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11 DEC 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Walter Elder
History Staff
Office of Executive Secretariat

FROM: Richard J. Kerr
Associate Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT: Comment on Iran-Iraq War for Mr. McCone

1. The following is our comment, requested by John McCone, on the article, "The Iran-Iraq Balance: Demographic, Economic, and Military," by Michael W. Johnson.

2. The theme of the article--that Iran enjoys several significant advantages over Iraq that should help it to prevail in their current war--contains some important truths about this conflict but also some serious analytical flaws. The most valid aspect of the article is the highlighting of Iran's advantage in population and military manpower. Iraq is, indeed, experiencing manpower problems, and it is trying to use imported technology to compensate for Iran's greater size. Iran's willingness and ability to use lightly trained troops in human wave assaults is justifiably one of Iraq's biggest worries as far as the future of the ground war is concerned.

3. The financial statistics presented in the article give a somewhat misleading picture of the economic strength of each country. For example, Iraq's greater accumulation of foreign debt during the course of the war is partly a reflection of its greater credit worthiness. Iran's economic strength is still questionable enough that it is having considerable difficulty securing long-term credit. In addition, to point to Iran's growth in gross domestic product since 1980 overlooks the fact that the Iranian economy was depressed in 1980 because of the turmoil of the Islamic revolution.

4. The discussion of the military balance using Lanchester's model has serious methodological flaws that obscure what is still an important Iraqi advantage in equipment. For example, the author asserts that Iraq could use only as many tanks as its current

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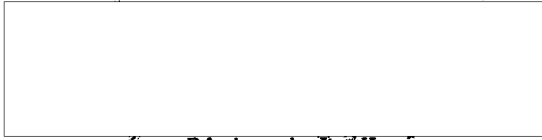
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divisional structure and Soviet-style Tables of Organization and Equipment would imply, thereby disregarding the possibility of augmentation and the importance of having spare equipment available to replace combat losses. The "firepower scores" are based on unstated assumptions that probably are wrong, given Iran's severe equipment shortages in most of its units. To disregard differences in the effectiveness with which each side uses its firepower is also wrong, because what matters is not the small size of the "effectiveness scores" but rather which side has the larger score.

5. In short, Iran may still "win" this war, but, if so, it will be because it uses its superior manpower to make a breakthrough on the ground that shatters Iraqi morale, and not because of an advantage in economic strength or firepower.

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